A ſad Relation OF A DREADFUL FIRE AT *Cottenham*, Four miles diſtant from *Cambridge*.

It begun upon *Saturday* the 29th. of *April*, 1676. and in the ſpace of five hours, conſumed above a hundred dwelling Houſes, beſides, Barns, Stables, Out-houſes, Stacks of Corn, Hay, Faggots, Turffs, &c. To the Value of many thouſands of pounds.

With an account of a Gentleman's Servant that was Burn'd in a miſerable manner, by venturing to ſave ſome Houſe-hold-ſtuff, &c.

Written by an Eye-witneſs, and publiſhed for general ſatisfaction.

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A ſad Relation of a Dreadful Fire

at *Cottenham*, Four Miles diſtant from *Cambridge*.

THat I may not trouble the Reader with a prefatory introduction to ſo ſad and deplorable an accident, there is a place of conſiderable note in the County of *Cambridge*, four miles diſtant from that famous Univerſity of *Cambridge*, called *Cottenham*; it lyes in the Rode to *Ely*, and though it be not a Market-Town, and ſo properly called a Village, yet for the number and compactneſs, of the houſes, the wealth of the inhabitants, and conſiderableneſs of their traffique, it equals many eminent Towns in *England*, and is a ſubject that gives too remarkable an occaſion for the preſent Relation.

It conſiſts chiefly in one fair Street that is above a mile in length, formerly called *Fenning-Street*, but of late years Vulgarly termed, and better known by the name of *Church-ſtreet*: moſt of the Inhabitats are

Yeomen, and substantial Farmers, so that their Barns and backsides were full of Corn, Straw, hay, Stacks of Faggots, Turft, and such like combustible matter, which with the drought of the season, and their scarcity of water, could not but give great advantage to that great destroyer which within the space of five hours, consumed above a hundred houses, besides a great number of Barns, Stables, and other out-houses, to a value greater then at the present can be computed.

This Dreadful fire began on Saturday the 29th. of *April* last past, about ten of the Clock in the morning, when most of the Inhabitants were gone to *Cambridge*-Market, so that what ever assistance or relief they might otherwise have hoped for, they were utterly deprived of almost any other then their tears, and prayers; And though many poor wretches have been apt to think that had they had more help, they might have prevented, or at least have abated its fury, yet when providence is pleas'd to ordain it shall be thus, it is in vain for poor Mortals to fancy it might have been otherwise. Not but that I think we are obliged to take all immaginable care to prevent such disasters, and to use the utmost of our endeavours to suppress this common enemy of mankind, but I say, when all this will not do, 'tis then but a fooliſh Retrospection either to blame the person through whose negligence or misfortune the calamity came, or to say if it had been so it had never been as it is.

I have made this short derivation from the story in behalf of the person who was the unhappy occasion,

of

or rather Instrument of this unfortunate accident, because I know people that suffer in any general calmity are exceedingly apt to blame such as are any way concern'd in the cause, though they are more than equal sufferers in the effect, which is (if not an unjust) I am sure a very imprudent accrimination: the person I aim at is a Farmers Wife of *Cottenham*, well stricken in years, of whom I shall not attempt to give a Character because it may seem altogether impertinent to my purpose; let it suffice that whatsoever mischief she were the occasion of, the sequel of the story will make it appear she did it not with a mischievous design, but meerly through misfortune or inadvertency, for having newly baked, she took some of the embers, imagining they had been out, and carried them into the back-side in a scuttle, and there threw them down with the scuttle over them, near to a stack of course sedge, which they use in that Countrey to heat Ovens, and upon several other occasions, they call it by the name of a Stuff Reek; and (I know not how) the embers coming into the fresh air, it seems they began to glow, and to lay hold of some scattering straw or other combustible matter near at hand, and so by degrees to creep to the Reek, which being loose and very dry, was immediately blown up into a fierce and violent flame: This presently alarm'd the Neighbours, who immediately ran and used their utmost endeavours to extinguish it in its infancy, knowing how tyrannical a Master Fire is, when once it ceases to be a servant; But in spight of their most careful and industrious endeavours, in a very short time it

consumed not onely the Reek where it begun, but all the Out-houses, Barns, Stables, and Dwelling-House of the said Farmer *B.* and that with so much fury (the wind blowing pretty fresh) that great flakes of flaming straw were carried into the Aair, and carried more then a furlong from the place.

This Farmers house stood almost at the entrance of the Town, at a place they call *Green-end*, so the next house remaining entire, the people were in hopes it would have ended there; but one of the Flakes it seems was blown over the next house, and leaving it standing, as a remarkable signal of Gods mercy, took fire of the next beyond it, and so without stop or stay vvent raging on vvith all immaginable fury, on both sides of the street, and in spight of Engines or any other assistance, burn'd dovvn the vvhole street as far as the Church, before three a Clock in the Afternoon, vvhich is in distance of Ground neer three quarters of a Mile, there being more than a hundred dvvelling houses, besides Out-houses, Corn, *Hay*, Turff, &c. consumed in that short time.

Near the Church stands the house of an eminent Doctor in divinity, vvhose Barns, Stables, &c. vvere all burn'd, yet his dwelling house saved; but a servant of his returning into a house that vvas a fire, vvas unhappily surprized, the roof falling in, and scorched in so miserable a manner that if he be not already dead, it seems in humane conjecture an impossible thing he should recover: vvhich is the onely man, I hear of, that suffered by the fire as to his person; there vvas

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at the first a discourse of two Children that were burned to ashes, but upon examination I cannot find that there was any thing of truth, or ground for that report, nevertheless at the time of my leaving the Town (which was but on Saturday-night) it was impossible to hear of all the mischief that this sad and implacable enemy had wrought there, for the people were full of complaints when they missed their children or Relations, fearing they might be Burned in those merciless flames, with which they sometimes so encompassed, that the most wary could hardly find a way to escape.

And now having given you this short and true Relation of so sad an accident, I hope those to whose hands it shall come, will not be contented barely to gratifie their curiosities in a cursory perusal of it, because (forsooth) i is a strange story; This is an unmanly and uncharitable employment for the thoughts of any person that is serious or good, and looks as if a man took a kind of delight in novelty, though the Subject were never so Tragical; and truly I should be very sorry (as much Pamphlet as this is) that ever it should come into such a hand. For I look upon every person that reads this story to be so far concerned in it, as to bless God that has spared him a competency of Temporal Blessings, and to commiserate those poor souls upon whom this judgement is fallen, resolving hereafter (if there should be any occasion) to contribute something to the reparation of their losses, or at least, to pay them the just tribute of compassion.

And

And as for those that have been sufferers by this or any such like Calamity (if I might be thought worthy to advise them) methinks they would do well to bear their afflictions with patience, and acquiesie in the dispensations of Gods providence, without murmuring or repining at the instrument, and look on themselves as the Authors of their own misfortunes; had not they sin'd doubtless God had not punish'd them; therefore let no man say I am injured, but follow his employment chearfully, and doubtless God will either raise his fortunes to his mind, or humble his mind to his condition which is known by every one that enjoys it to be the greatest of worldly blessings.

Blandford in ~~Sou~~ Dorsetshire
Abingdon S. h. e some barns

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